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SUBJECT: HUNGARY H1N1 UPDATE: NEW CASES DOWN, FOR NOW

REF: (A) 09 BUDAPEST 322
(B) 09 BUDAPEST 399
(C) 09 BUDAPEST 524
(D) 09 BUDAPEST 572
(E) 09 BUDAPEST 607
(F) 09 BUDAPST 659
(G) 09 BUDAPEST 763
(H) 09 BUDAPEST 813
(I) 09 BUDAPEST 815
(J) 09 BUDAPEST 836

¶1. Summary: The first wave of the H1N1 pandemic in Hungary appears to be in decline, according to data from the Influenza Surveillance Division of Hungary's National Center for Epidemiology. However, the Center cautions that a second wave may arrive shortly, as schools reopen following the Christmas and New Year's holidays. End summary.

¶2. Latest statistics: According to the most recent epidemiological data, 10,700 flu-like cases were registered in week 53 of 2009 (December 28 - January 3), 30 per cent lower than the week before, and 75 percent lower than the 45,800 cases recorded in week 50 (December 7-13).

As of January 12, the total number of confirmed H1N1 deaths in Hungary stands at 58, of which only two of the victims had been vaccinated against the H1N1 virus (Note: In both cases, the patients suffered from chronic diseases and died a couple of days after vaccination, indicating there was not sufficient time to build up immunity against the virus. End note.)

¶3. In a press release issued on January 7, Chief Medical Officer Ferenc Falus stated that about 30 percent of Hungarians (about 3 million people out of a total population of roughly 10 million) have now been vaccinated against H1N1. He encouraged those who have not yet done so to get vaccinated, as a second wave of the infections is expected in the coming weeks. About 3 million doses of the domestically produced Fluval P vaccine is available at the National Stockpile Institute, in pharmacies and healthcare institutions, he noted.

¶4. As the first wave of the pandemic gathered strength in late 2009, Hungarian attitudes about it and the Fluval P vaccine changed as well. Opinion research conducted in November and December charted a steady decline in the percentage of Hungarians who said they did not plan to get vaccinated: declining from 73 on November 2, to 59 percent during the November 6-10 timeframe, to 51 percent during the period December 4-7 (the most recent period for which opinion data is available).

¶5. As public attitudes on the issue shifted, the political debate about the safety and efficacy of the Fluval P vaccine quieted as well. Just before Christmas, the main opposition Party, Fidesz, openly called on Hungarians to get vaccinated. This represented a change in Fidesz's earlier public posture on the issue. As Pos previously reported (Ref H), throughout much of the autumn, members of the opposition repeatedly raised concerns about the efficacy and safety of the Hungarian vaccine and implied that its development,

manufacture and distribution was the result of corrupt business relationships between the government and the Hungarian pharmaceutical company Omninvest.

16. Finally, in a related development intended to reassure Hungarians that Fluval P is safe and effective, researchers from Hungary's National Center for Epidemiology, the University of Debrecen's Medical and Health Sciences Center, and the State Primary Care Centers in Pilisvorosvar and Veszprem, published the results of clinical trials on the vaccine in the January 2, 2010 issue of The Lancet. The article is titled "Safety and immunogenicity of a 2009 pandemic influenza A H1N1 vaccine when administered alone or simultaneously with the seasonal influenza vaccine for the 2009-10 influenza season: a multicentre, randomized controlled trial." (The Lancet, Volume 375, Issue 9708, Pages 49 - 55, 2 January 2010)

Kounalakis